

Examples of Electronic Chain Mail

\$800 From Microsoft

Original Text

Netscape and AOL have recently merged to form the largest internet company in the world. In an effort to remain at pace with this giant, Microsoft has introduced a new email tracking system as a way to keep Internet Explorer as the most popular browser on the market. This email is a beta test of the new software and Microsoft has generously offered to compensate who participate in the testing process. For each person you send this email to, you will be given \$5. For every person they give it to, you will be given an additional \$3. For every person they send it to you will receive \$1. Microsoft will tally all the emails produced under your name over a two Week period and then email you with more instructions. This beta test is only for Microsoft Windows users because the email tracking device that contacts Microsoft is embedded into the code of Windows 95 and 98. I know you guys hate forwards. But I started this a month ago because I Was very short on cash. A week ago I got an email from Microsoft asking me For my address. I gave it to them and yesterday I got a check the mail for \$800. It really works. I wanted you to get a piece of the action. You won't regret it.

Comments

This is a classic pyramid scene chain letter, except that the user is not prompted to send actual cash. None of the technical facts are true, and no money will be provided.

A.I.D.S. Needle in Theater

Original Text

Safety Bulletin

For your information, a couple of weeks ago, in a Dallas movie theater, a person sat on something sharp in one of the seats. When she stood up to see what it was, a needle was found poking through the seat with an attached note saying, "Welcome to the real world...you have been infected with HIV." The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta reports similar events have taken place in several other cities recently. All of the needles tested HAVE been positive for HIV. The CDC also reports that needles have been found in the coin return areas of pay phones and soda machines. Everyone is asked to use extreme caution when confronted with these types of situations. All public chairs should be thoroughly but safely inspected prior to any use. A thorough visual inspection is considered the bare minimum. Furthermore, they ask that everyone notify their family members and friends of the potential dangers, as well. Thank You.

The previous information was sent from the Dallas Police Department to all of the local governments in the Washington area and was interdepartmentally dispersed. Everyone is asked to please pass this to as many people as possible.

Barbara Gaskins Wallace National Naval Medical Center Patient Administration

Safety Bulletin

Comments

This is a typical scare message that has no validity.

Chain Letter/Hoax Parody

Original Text

I know this guy whose neighbor, a young man, was home recovering from having been served a rat in his bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. So anyway, one day he went to sleep and when he awoke he was in his bathtub and it was full of ice and he was sore all over. When he got out of the tub he realized that HIS KIDNEYS HAD BEEN STOLEN and he saw a note on his mirror that said "Call 911!" But he was afraid to use his phone because it was connected to his computer, and there was a virus on his computer that would destroy his hard drive if he opened an e-mail entitled "Join the crew!" He knew it wasn't a hoax because he himself was a computer programmer who was working on software to save us from Armageddon when the year 2000 rolls around. His program will prevent a global disaster in which all the computers get together and distribute the \$600 Neiman Marcus cookie recipe under the leadership of Bill Gates. (It's true-I read it all last week in a mass e-mail from BILL GATES HIMSELF, who was also promising me a free Disneyworld vacation and \$5,000 if I would forward the e-mail to everyone I know.) The poor man then tried to call 911 from a pay phone to report his missing kidneys, but reaching into the coin-return slot he got jabbed with an HIV-infected needle around which was wrapped a note that said, "Welcome to the world of AIDS." Luckily he was only a few blocks from the hospital-the one, actually, where that little boy who is dying of cancer is, the one whose last wish is for everyone in the world to send him an e-mail and the American Cancer Society has agreed to pay him a nickel for every e-mail he receives. I sent him two e-mails and one of them was a bunch of x's and o's in the shape of an angel (if you get it and forward it to twenty people you will have good luck but ten people you will only have ok luck and if you send it to less than ten people you will have BAD LUCK FOR SEVEN YEARS).

So anyway the poor guy tried to drive himself to the hospital, but on the way he noticed another car driving along without his lights on. To be helpful, he flashed his lights at him and was promptly shot as part of a gang initiation.

And it's a little-known fact that the YIK problem caused the Dark Ages.

Comments

This message combines numerous hoax and chain mail messages into a single message. It references a well-known computer hoax ([Join the Crew](#)) and several chain mails ([Kidney Harvesting](#), [\\$800 From Microsoft](#), and [A.I.D.S. Needle in a Theater](#)), with the common good luck/bad luck message tacked on. However, when combined, the presentation seems especially outlandish, and it is likely that this is more of a parody than a true chain letter.

Cooler Chain Letter

Original Text

Hey everybody! This has got to be the coolest chain letter i've ever gotten! All you have to do is send it to 11 people and this little video comes up on your screen and shows the funniest clip. i can't tell you what it is but i was laughing so hard! So spend a few seconds to send this and you'll be glad you did!

Comments

This electronic chain letter is more along the lines of a traditional chain letter: you forward it on to a certain number of people ("friends") and you will be rewarded. Unfortunately, as there is no program attached, there is no mechanism to provide you with the "video", so you will never reap the reward (which is often true for traditional chain letters as well).

Disney Trip Give-away

Original Text

Disney message & \$5,000.00

If you read below you will see the note from Walt Disney Jr. & Management at Disney World.

Basically if this messages reaches 13,000 people, everyone will receive \$5,000.00 or a free, all expenses paid, trip to Disney World in anytime during the summer of 1999.

See the note below - its worth it!!!! Everyone is to resend to 15 individuals. Please read and forward to as many friends as possible...we've checked up on this and this is no joke or a chain letter or something if this reaches 13,000 people...duplicate entries don't count, though... So, please help & pass on... thank you, and here you go!!!

WALT DISNEY JR. GREETING:

Hello Disney fans,

And thank you for signing up for Bill Gates' Beta Email Tracking. My name is Walt Disney Jr. Here at Disney we are working with Microsoft which has just compiled an e-mail tracing program that tracks everyone to whom this message is forward to.

It does this through an unique IP (Internet Protocol) address log book database. We are experimenting with this and need your help. Forward this to everyone you know and if it reaches 13,000 people, 1,300 of the people on the list will receive \$5,000, and the rest will receive a free trip for two to Disney World for one week during the summer of 1999 at our expense.

Enjoy.

Note: Duplicate entries will not be counted. You will be notified by email with further instructions once this email has reached 13,000 people.

Your friends, Walt Disney Jr., Disney, Bill Gates, & The Microsoft Development Team.

Comments

This message is a variation of the [\\$800 From Microsoft](#) chain letter, with additional references to Disney to add authority. None of the information is true, and no money will be provided.

Great Gas Out

Original Text

Thought you might be interested in this.

"It's time we did something about the price of gasoline in America! We are all sick and tired of high prices when there are literally millions of gallons in storage. Know what I found out? If there was just ONE day when no one purchased any gasoline, prices would drop drastically. The so-called oil cartel has decided to slow production by some 2 million barrels per day to drive up the price. I have decided to see how many Americans we can get to NOT BUY ANY GASOLINE on one particular day! Let's have a GAS OUT! Do not buy any gasoline on APRIL 30, 1999!!!! Buy on Thursday before, or Saturday after. Do not buy any gasoline on FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 1999. Wanna help? Send this message to everyone you know. Ask them to do the same. All we need is a few million to participate in order to make a difference."

Comments

Although the plan appeals to many (gas is a staple) and it seems like a viable protest, there are significant inaccuracies. First, we have just come out of period when gas was at its lowest price (in terms of real dollars) in decades. Even with the OPEC cutback and recent jump in prices, real dollar gas costs continue to remain low. More obviously, there is a major logic flaw. The note recommends buying gas on Thursday or Saturday, just not Friday. But the fact remains that we'll still end up buying the same amount of gas, the gas stations will make the same amount of money, and nothing will happen to the price of gas. Now if we all didn't DRIVE for a day...

Infected Bananas

Original Text

Subject: !IMPORTANT! Infected Bananas

Must Read, Very important! Life or Death. Please pass on to your Friends & family.

Dear friends, Please forward this to everyone you care about!

The report has been validated from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) in Atlanta.

Warning:

Several shipments of bananas from Costa Rica have been infected with narcotizing fasciitis, otherwise known as flesh eating bacteria. Recently this disease has decimated the monkey population in Costa Rica. We are just now learning that the disease has been able to graft itself to the skin of fruits in the region, most notably the banana, which is Costa Rica's largest export. Until this finding scientists were not sure how the infection was being transmitted.

It is advised not to purchase bananas for the next three weeks as this is the period of time for which bananas that have been shipped to the US with the possibility of carrying this disease.

If you have eaten a banana in the last 2-3 days and come down with a fever followed by a skin infection, SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION! The skin infection from Narcotizing Fasciitis is very painful and eats two to three centimeters of flesh per hour.

Amputation is likely, death is possible. If you are more than an hour from a medical center, burning the flesh ahead of the infected area is advised to help slow the spread of the infection.

The FDA has been reluctant to issue a country wide warning because of fear of nationwide panic. They have secretly admitted that they feel upwards of 15,000 Americans will be affected by this, but that these are acceptable numbers. Please

forward this to as many people as you care about as we do not feel 15,000 people is an acceptable number.

Manheim Research Institute Centers for Disease Control Atlanta, Georgia

Comments

This message contains many of the common hoax elements, from an interest-catching subject line to a body with a life-threatening message that provides not one, but two two "authorities". There is no evidence that this is a real threat, and, even if it was, it would not warrant a widespread mailing.

Jessica Mydek Chain Mail

Original Text

JESSICA MYDEK IS SEVEN YEARS OLD AND IS SUFFERING FROM AN ACUTE AND VERY RARE CASE OF CEREBRAL CARCINOMA. THIS CONDITION CAUSES SEVERE MALIGNANT BRAIN TUMORS AND IS A TERMINAL ILLNESS. THE DOCTORS HAVE GIVEN HER SIX MONTHS TO LIVE. AS PART OF HER DYING WISH, SHE WANTED TO START A CHAIN LETTER TO INFORM PEOPLE OF THIS CONDITION AND TO SEND PEOPLE THE MESSAGE TO LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND ENJOY EVERY MOMENT, A CHANCE THAT SHE WILL NEVER HAVE.

FURTHERMORE, THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY AND SEVERAL CORPORATE SPONSORS HAVE AGREED TO DONATE THREE CENTS TOWARD CONTINUING CANCER RESEARCH FOR EVERY NEW PERSON THAT GETS FORWARDED THIS MESSAGE. PLEASE GIVE JESSICA AND ALL CANCER VICTIMS A CHANCE. ADD ACS@AOL.COM TO THE LIST OF PEOPLE THAT YOU SEND THIS TO SO THAT THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY WILL BE ABLE TO CALCULATE HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE GOTTEN THIS. IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS, SEND THEM TO THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY AT ACS@AOL.COM.

Three cents for every person that receives this letter turns out to be a lot of money considering how many people will get this letter and how many people they, in turn, pass it on to. Please go ahead and forward it to whoever you know- it really doesn't take much to help out.

*Jean Ann Linney, Ph.D.
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Comments

This is a basic chain mail message, with all of the usual elements. Its altruism is almost cloying, guaranteed to elicit an emotional response. It cites an "authority", adding credence to the message. It has a target, unfortunately a real and truly charitable one where the the added cost and aggravation of this hoax has had an adverse effect on its mission. Ultimately, this represents chain mail at its worst.

Kidney Harvesting

Original Text

This will blow you away!!! Be careful!

"Reason not to party anymore"

This guy went out last Saturday night to a party. He was having a good time, had a couple of beers and some girl seemed to like him and invited him to go to another party. He quickly agreed and decided to go along with her. She took him to a party in some apartment and they continued to drink, and even got involved with some other drugs (unknown which).

The next thing he knew, he woke up completely naked in a bathtub filled with ice. He was still feeling the effects of the drugs, but looked around to see he was alone. He looked down at his chest, which had "CALL 911 OR YOU WILL DIE" written on it in lipstick. He saw a phone was on a stand next to the tub, so he picked it up and dialed.

He explained to the EMS operator what the situation was and that he didn't know where he was, what he took, or why he was really calling. She advised him to get out of the tub. He did, and she asked him to look himself over in the mirror. He did, and appeared normal, so she told him to check his back. He did, only to find two 9 inch slits on his lower back. She told him to get back in the tub immediately, and they sent a rescue team over.

Apparently, after being examined, he found out more of what had happened. His kidneys were stolen. They are worth 10,000 dollars each on the black market. (I was unaware this even existed.) Several guesses are in order: The second party was a sham, the people involved had to be at least medical students, and it was not just recreational drugs he was given.

Regardless, he is currently in the hospital on life support, awaiting a spare kidney. The University of Texas in conjunction with Baylor University Medical Center is conducting

tissue research to match the sophomore student with a donor. I wish to warn you about a new crime ring that is targeting business travelers. This ring is well organized, well funded, has very skilled personnel, and is currently in most major cities and recently very active in New Orleans.

The crime begins when a business traveler goes to a lounge for a drink at the end of the work day. A person in the bar walks up as they sit alone and offers to buy them a drink. The last thing the traveler remembers until they wake up in a hotel room bath tub, their body submerged to their neck in ice, is sipping that drink. There is a note taped to the wall instructing them not to move and to call 911. A phone is on a small table next to the bathtub for them to call. The business traveler calls 911 who have become quite familiar with this crime. The business traveler is instructed by the 911 operator to very slowly and carefully reach behind them and feel if there is a tube protruding from their lower back. The business traveler finds the tube and answers, "Yes." The 911 operator tells them to remain remain still, having already sent paramedics to help. The operator knows that both of the business traveler's kidneys have been harvested.

This is not a scam or out of a science fiction novel, it is real. It is documented and confirmable. If you travel or someone close to you travels, please be careful. Sadly, this is very true. My husband is a Houston Firefighter/EMT and they have received alerts regarding this crime ring. It is to be taken very seriously. The daughter of a friend of a fellow firefighter had this happen to her. Skilled doctor's are performing these crimes! (which, by the way have been highly noted in the Las Vegas area).

Additionally, the military has received alerts regarding this. This story blew me away. I really want as many people to see this as possible so please bounce this to whoever you can.

*Michele Shafer - DML/Lab Administration Medical Manager Research & Development
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Is this not one of the scariest things you have ever heard of? PLEASE forward this to everyone you know.

Comments

This is a typical scare message that has no validity.

October 31, 2001 (Shopping Mall)

Original Text

**** High Priority ****

Fellow co-workers,

A friend sent this to me. I do not know if this is true, but incase it is, I just want you to be aware.

Mary

My friend Colleen arrived for a facial when FBI agents were leaving Murad on Sunday, October 7, 2001. They were there to interrogate a girl who worked there to find out if she knew anything. The reason for their lead was she was best friends with a girl who was dating an Arab man, who disappeared and was involved in the terrorist attacks on the WTC. He disappeared this summer and left her a note, saying the following in the Effect of:

"I have to go away and will not be able to see you again. Please do me a favor and do not fly in any planes on September 11, 2001 nor shop at any shopping malls on October 31, 2001 "

Don't know about you but I live across the street from a shopping mall, and my in-laws do too. Given my daughter is usually at their house on a Wednesday afternoon, right near the mall, am thinking of where else to go.

Halloween may not be so Happy.

Please send this to anyone that you know. Let's hope this isn't for real, but since it was actually left in a letter to a loved one from one of the people involved in the attacks of September 11, 2001, I am not taking it too lightly.

*Love,
Terrie*

*Terrie Myerchin
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Comments

The specific warning is a hoax, although the events described can occur. The authority has become the FBI, with the usual admonition to send the message to everyone you know. During this troubling time, we do not need to spread rumors. Although possibly

harmless, there could be an impact on consumer spending and confidence that could have an effect on the economy.

PBS/NPR Petition

Original Text

Dear Friend:

An important message about public funding of NEA, PBS & NPR...

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the issue of whether public funding to an artist can be linked with the idea of whether the art is 'decent.' (Who decides? No one knows yet.) On NPR Morning Edition recently, Nina Totenberg said that if the Supreme Court supports Congress, it will essentially mean the end of the NEA. A similar fate would likely follow with Congressional funding for NPR, the NEH & PBS.

This petition is being passed around the internet. Please add your name to it so that funding can be maintained for the NEA, NEH, NPR & PBS. This is being forwarded to several people at once to add their names to the petition. It won't matter if many people receive the same list as the names are being merged. For anyone who thinks NPR/PBS is a worthwhile expenditure of \$1.12/year of their taxes, a petition follows.

If you sign, please forward on to others (not back to me). If not, please don't kill it -- send it to the email address listed here: wein2688@blue.univn

PBS (Public Television), NPR (National Public Radio), and the arts and humanities are facing major cutbacks in funding. In spite of the efforts of each station to reduce spending costs and streamline their services, some government officials believe that the funding currently going to these programs is too large a portion of funding for something which is seen as not worthwhile.

****Currently, taxes from the general public for PBS equal \$1.12 per person per year, and the National Endowment for the Arts equals \$.64 a year.****

A January 1995 CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll indicated that 76% of Americans want to keep funding PBS, third only to national defense and law enforcement as the most valuable programs for federal funding. Each year, the Senate and House Appropriations committees each have 13 subcommittees with jurisdiction over many programs and agencies. Each subcommittee passes its own appropriation bill. The goal each year is to have each bill signed by the beginning of the fiscal year, which is October 1. The only way that our representatives can be aware of the base of support for PBS and funding for these types of programs is by making our voices heard. Please add your name to this list and forward it to friends if you believe in what we stand for. This list will be forwarded to

the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, and Representative Newt Gingrich, who is the instigator of the action to cut funding to these worthwhile programs.

**If you happen to be the 150th, 200th, 250th, etc. signer of this petition, please forward a copy to:
wein2688@blue.univnorthco.edu.*

This way we can keep track of the lists and organize them. Forward this to everyone you know, and help us to keep these programs alive.

Thank you.

Comments

This chain mail provides an example of the problems with using the Internet for some functions. In many ways, it has all of the markings of a spurious chain mail. It appeals to an emotional issue, includes legitimate statistics to provide credibility, and has an e-mail target. However, it actually started out as a legitimate message from two students at the University of Northern Colorado...in 1995. But, once unleashed, there was no mechanism to take it out of circulation. The students have long since moved on, the actions on the publicly-funded operations have occurred (they survived), and the petition is now a dead issue. However, it lives on in cyberspace, using up electronic resources and distracting people from more valid concerns. It may lose momentum now that Gingrich has left office, providing a clue to its obsolescence.

Perfume Warning

Original Text

I received this from a friend....PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO YOUR GIRL FRIENDS!!! I was approached yesterday afternoon around 3:30 PM in the WalMart parking lot by two males, asking what kind of perfume I was wearing. Then they asked if I'd like to sample some fabulous scent they were willing to sell me at a very reasonable rate. I probably would have agreed had I not received an email some weeks ago warning of a "Wanna smell this neat perfume?" scam. The men continued to stand between parked cars, I guess to wait for someone else to hit on. I stopped a lady going towards them, pointed at them, and told her that I got an e-mail at work about someone walking up to you at the malls or in parking lots, and asking you to SNIFF PERFUME that they are selling at a cheap price. THIS IS NOT PERFUME --- IT IS ETHER! When you sniff it, you'll pass out. And they'll take your wallet, your valuables, and heaven knows what else. If it were not for this e-mail, I probably would have sniffed the "perfume". But thanks to the generosity of an emailing friend, I was spared whatever might have happened to me. I wanted to do the same for you.

IF YOU ARE A MAN AND RECEIVE THIS PASS IT ON TO ALL THE GIRLS YOU KNOW! Ladies this happened to me yesterday and I didn't smell the perfume either thanks to this eMail! This is true! Believe me, I know! I was over by Big Lots in the parking lot at lunchtime when I was approached. So either day or night, it does not matter. There were three guys together when I was approached. I called the police when I got back to my desk.

Like the eMail says above, LET EVERYONE KNOW ABOUT THIS: YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY, CO-WORKERS, whoever. It helped me. The first thing that popped in my head was this eMail warning.

Comments

The fact that this message encourages mass dissemination categorizes it as electronic chain mail. While it is entirely possible that the *modus operandi* described has and is being used, it is one of thousands of possible scams or techniques. The bottom line is that there is no substitute for being cautious and aware of your environment. Mass mailings will only cause undue alarm and masses of spam.

Six Degrees of Separation

Original Text

To whomever is receiving this message:

After receiving countless forwards at school claiming that everyone in this world knows each other, I decided I wanted to try this theory myself, and use it as my thesis for my sociology class. The purpose of this experiment is to see how many emails I can receive from people that I don't know, that are somehow are [sic] connected to people that I do know. I am also curious to see how many people actually continue this email on. Please forward this to as many people as you know, and send it also to me at my school email address. For example, if you sent it to Jon123@aol.com, Mike123@aol.com, Dave123@aol.com, Chris123@aol.com...also send it to me: MJLENNER@WAM.UMD.EDU. That is my address at school where I will be recording and tallying the results. DO NOT REPLY TO THIS ADDRESS...forward this message to all of your friends and send a copy to me at "MJLENNER@WAM.UMD.EDU". Thanks again for your help with my sociology project. Those who write back to me will receive a COOL gift via e-mail. Thanks.

Comments

Another basic chain mail message. Instead of appealing to one's charity, however, it appeals more to one's intellect with the opportunity to participate in a scientific study, surely a worthy pursuit. This also is what gives the hoax its "authority", with the references to school and an educational e-mail address providing credibility. The offer of

a gift is an added incentive. (If indeed a "gift" was received, we would worry very much about its true function. The gullibility that led users to participate in the first place makes them prime targets for Trojan Horse or virus programs.)